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ELECTIONS TO FILL VACANCIES
IN PRINCIPAL ORGANS:
ELECTION OF A MEMBER OF
THE INTERNATIONAL COURT
OF JUSTICE

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fiftieth year

Memorandum by the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. By a letter dated 24 February 1995, the Deputy Registrar of the International Court of Justice informed the Secretary-General of the death of Judge Roberto Ago (Italy) on that date and of the occurrence of a vacancy in the Court as a result of his death. Judge Ago became a member of the Court on 6 February 1979 and was re-elected as from 6 February 1988. His term of office would have ended on 5 February 1997. According to Article 14 of the Statute of the Court, the vacancy shall be filled by the same method as that laid down for the regular election and the Secretary-General shall, within one month of the occurrence of the vacancy, issue the invitations for nominations provided for in Article 5. According to Article 5, the invitations for nominations have to be made at least three months before the date of the election which is, pursuant to Article 14, to be fixed by the Security Council.

2. By a note dated 6 March 1995 addressed to the Security Council, the Secretary-General drew its attention to Article 14 of the Statute of the Court regarding fixing the date of the election to fill the vacancy in the Court (S/1995/178). Pursuant to Article 14 of the Statute of the Court, the Security Council decided by resolution 979 (1995) of 9 March 1995 that the election to fill the vacancy should take place on 21 June 1995, at a meeting of the Security Council and at a meeting of the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session. The General Assembly at its 99th meeting held on 31 March 1995 decided to reopen consideration of agenda item 15 (c) (see A/49/861 and A/49/PV.99).

3. Pursuant to Article 5, paragraph 1, of the Statute of the Court, the Secretary-General, in a communication dated 13 March 1995, invited the national groups of States parties to the Statute of the Court to undertake the nomination of persons in a position to accept the duties of a member of the Court. The Secretary-General further requested that nominations should be received no later than 31 May 1995. A list of the nominations received by that date and a list of the curricula vitae of the candidates received are transmitted to the General Assembly and the Security Council (A/49/910-S/1995/449 and A/49/911-S/1995/450, respectively). The names of the candidates will appear on the ballot papers to be distributed during the election.

4. Article 15 of the Statute of the Court provides that a member of the Court elected to replace a member whose term of office has not expired shall hold office for the remainder of the predecessor's term. The member elected to replace Judge Roberto Ago will thus serve until 5 February 1997.

5. The present composition of the Court and the procedure in the General Assembly and the Security Council for filling the vacancy are described below.

II. COMPOSITION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

6. The present composition of the International Court of Justice is as follows:

President: Mr. Mohammed Bedjaoui (Algeria)*

Vice-President: Mr. Stephen M. Schwebel (United States of America)*

Judges: Shigeru Oda (Japan)**
Robert Yewdall Jennings (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)*** 1/
Gilbert Guillaume (France)***
Mohammed Shahabuddeen (Guyana)*
Andrés Aguilar Mawdsley (Venezuela)***
Christopher Weeramantry (Sri Lanka)***
Raymond Ranjeva (Madagascar)***
Géza Herczegh (Hungary)**
Shi Jiuyong (China)**
Carl-August Fleischhauer (Germany)**
Abdul G. Koroma (Sierra Leone)**
Vladlen S. Vereshchetin (Russian Federation)*

III. PROCEDURE IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL

7. The election will take place in accordance with the following provisions:

(a) The Statute of the Court, in particular Articles 2 to 4, 7 to 12 and 14;

(b) Rules 150 and 151 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly;

(c) Rules 40 and 61 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council.

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* Term of office expires on 5 February 1997.

** Term of office expires on 5 February 2003.

*** Term of office expires on 5 February 2000.

1/ By a letter dated 27 February 1995, the President of the International Court of Justice, pursuant to Article 13, paragraph 4 of the Statute of the Court, transmitted to the Secretary-General Sir Robert Yewdall Jenning's letter of resignation dated 15 February 1995. In this letter, Sir Robert Jennings gave notice of resignation as a member of the Court, the resignation to take effect on 10 July 1995. By its resolution 980 (1995) dated 22 March 1995, the Security Council decided that the election to fill the vacancy shall take place on 12 July 1995 at a meeting of the Security Council and at a meeting of the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session.

8. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 264 (III) of 8 October 1948, Nauru and Switzerland, which are parties to the Statute of the Court but not members of the United Nations, have been invited to participate in the General Assembly in electing members of the Court in the same manner as the States members of the United Nations.

9. On the date of the election, the General Assembly and the Security Council will proceed, independently of one another, to elect a member of the Court to fill the vacancy (Art. 8 of the Statute).

10. According to Article 2 of the Statute, judges are to be elected, regardless of their nationality, from among persons of high moral character, who possess the qualifications required in their respective countries for appointment to the highest judicial offices, or are jurisconsults of recognized competence in international law. Article 9 requires electors to bear in mind not only that the person to be elected should individually possess the qualifications required, but also that in the body as a whole the representation of the main forms of civilization and of the principal legal systems of the world should be assured.

11. The candidate who obtains an absolute majority of votes both in the General Assembly and in the Security Council will be considered elected (Art. 10, para. 1, of the Statute).

12. The consistent practice of the United Nations has been to interpret the words "absolute majority" as meaning a majority of all electors. The electors in the General Assembly are all 185 Member States, together with the 2 non-member States mentioned in paragraph 8 above that are parties to the Statute of the Court. Accordingly, as at the date of the present memorandum, 94 votes constitute an absolute majority in the Assembly for the purpose of the election.

13. In the Security Council, eight votes constitute an absolute majority and no distinction is made between permanent and non-permanent members of the Council (Art. 10, para. 2, of the Statute).

14. Only those candidates whose names appear on the ballot papers are eligible for election. The electors in the General Assembly and in the Security Council will indicate the candidate for whom they wish to vote by placing a cross against the name on the ballot paper. Each elector may vote for only one candidate.

15. At the 915th plenary meeting of the General Assembly, on 16 November 1960, a procedural discussion took place as to whether rule 94 (then rule 96) of the rules of procedure of the Assembly should be applied in elections to the International Court of Justice. That rule lays down a procedure for restricted ballots in the event that, after the first ballot, the requisite number of candidates have not obtained the required majority. By 47 votes to 27, with 25 abstentions, the Assembly decided that the rule did not apply to elections to the Court and it proceeded to elect the requisite number of candidates by a series of unrestricted ballots. This decision has been followed consistently.

16. If in the first ballot in either the General Assembly or the Security Council no candidate receives an absolute majority, a second ballot will be held and balloting will continue in the same meeting until a candidate has obtained the required majority (rule 151 of the rules of procedure of the Assembly and rule 61 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Council).

17. Cases have arisen in the Security Council in which more than the required number of candidates have obtained an absolute majority on the same ballot. The practice followed by the Council has been to hold a new vote on all the candidates, and the President of the Council made no notification to the President of the General Assembly until only the required number of candidates, and no more, had obtained an absolute majority in the Council.

18. When a candidate has obtained the required majority in one of the organs, the President of that organ will notify the President of the other organ of the name of that candidate. Such notification is not communicated by the President of the second organ to the members until that organ has itself given a candidate the required majority of votes.

19. If, upon comparison of the name of the candidate so selected by the General Assembly and by the Security Council, it is found that the result if different, the Assembly and the Council will proceed, again independently of one another, in a second meeting and, if necessary, a third meeting, to elect one candidate by further ballots (Art. 11 of the Statutes), the results again being compared after one candidate has obtained an absolute majority in each organ. If necessary, the above procedure will be repeated until the General Assembly and the Security Council have given an absolute majority of votes to the same candidate.

20. If, however, after the third meeting, the vacancy still remains unfilled, the special procedure set out in Article 12 of the Statute of the Court may be resorted to at the request of either the General Assembly or the Security Council.